

socialplatform

Annual Conference 2008

Report for Workshop 3:

What is the role of European NGO networks in bridging the gap between European and national levels?



socialplatform

Brussels, December 9-10, 2008

Objectives of the workshop

- To discuss the role of European Networks as a capacity-builder, mediator and facilitator of information flow between the national level and the European arena
- To exchange experiences and jointly develop recommendations on capacities and structures that are needed
- To address the related issue of civil dialogue at national level with a particular focus on Central and Eastern Europe

socialplatform

Challenges

- Permanent tension between approach focusing on pre-defined European agenda and involvement in policy formulation and approach starting from interests + needs of members (their priority is to make a difference on the national level); how to channel back European information to the members and vice versa (re-translation of national interests to the European level)?
- To create an interest of what is happening at EU level
- Capacity-building of national members in terms of European issues and related communication strategies – giving ownership to the national level
- Transfer of the relevant knowledge (to understand the issues at stake in nat. context, too) and avoidance of information overload
- Language
- “Translation» of concepts and EU jargon
- Continuity of financing from public sources (for infrastructure, too)
- In some countries: Lack of support for civil dialogue (focus rather on decision making)

socialplatform

What works – But not well enough

- NFP an appropriate model to promote and structure information exchange on sector-specific issues/defined topics, supported by already existing nat. umbrella org. (problem: political cleavages)
- European networks are aware of their responsibility and their role in influencing the political agenda of Europe
- European networks are representing the interests of their members and filter out the priorities according to the respective targets their network is engaged in (role as facilitator and mediator)
- Training and empowerment of members in terms of European topics and policies
- Trans-national cooperation and transfer of best practice (also as incentive to get involved), also based on seminars, etc. and trans-national work on specific topics in regional clusters
- European networks as “door openers” for national members (and vice versa) allowing them to participate in consultation processes, civil dialogue
- European networks can provide for arguments on policy change at national level (and vice versa), building on European legislation or successful models

socialplatform

Recommendations

- Support the building up of national networks for more effective advocacy in the national policy arena and feeding back of consolidated positions to the European level
- Capacity-building for NGOs at all relevant levels (national, regional, local); providing the right skills to the respective level (European issues, policies – contents – and other process-based skills – procedures and methodology) by support of European NGOs and transnational and best practice transfer
- Training of trainers (multiplier effect); one element of MHE model
- Develop efficient communication strategies, make more use of the media; reach the grass-root level/citizens
- Inform on representativeness of European and national umbrellas (justify why the networks should get involved in civil dialogue, who they represent, how they arrive at common positions, etc.)
- Promote and strengthen NGOs' representation of Eastern and Central Europe in committees/ working groups/ boards of ENGOs
- Exchange within SP must be enhanced

socialplatform

Recommendations (cont.)

- Make use of institutional frameworks, cultural links and regional bonds (in a first step; afterwards easier: extension to EU 27)
- Promote exchange of best practices, peer learning and cooperation between organisations on the national level and cross borders/ transnational level
- Empower national NGOs to push their national governments towards implementing European policy and to make effective use of governance tools (e.g. OMC) at national level
- Empower national members to influence the European level by using their European NGO networks (bottom-up approach) based on structured forms of feeding back information on own positions, expectations, concerns of national NGOs
- Force national and regional governments to co-finance work of national organisations on European issues
- Use national NGOs as "trampoline" to states outside of EU Member States
- Encourage the establishment of umbrella organisations at national level

socialplatform



Outstanding issues

- Finding ways to stimulate civil dialogue all over Europe (media), transporting good news/encouraging examples of active citizenship (show how to make an impact)
- Influence and encourage media to positive reporting about NGOs' work and their role to promote social inclusion and cohesion
- Statutes for European NGOs are missing - providing a legal framework for trans-national associations/civil society organisations

socialplatform



Thank you!

Our contact information

socialplatform

Square de Meeûs 18
B-1050 Brussels
Belgium
T +32.2.511.37.14
F +32.2.511.19.09
platform@socialplatform.org
www.socialplatform.org